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SUBJECT: Zagreb Daily Report - January 28, 2010

¶1. (U) President Mesic Welcomes Reported UK, Belgian and Finnish Decision to Lift Blockade on Judiciary Chapter in EU Negotiations: Responding to reports that at an EU enlargement working group in Brussels earlier this week, the UK, Belgian and Finnish (although not the Dutch) representatives had agreed to remove their reserves on opening of Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights), President Mesic issued a press release on January 27 saying he welcomed the three governments' decision. Mesic said he was pleased that Croatia's efforts to achieve full cooperation with the ICTY were being acknowledged and "properly evaluated." Mesic's statements noted his long-standing support for cooperation with the ICTY, "not only as an unavoidable requirement in the EU accession talks, but as a necessary factor in dealing with the past and creating conditions for strengthening regional stability."

¶2. (U) Officials Confirm Attendance of Josipovic's Inauguration: The Office of President-Elect Ivo Josipovic on January 28 advised the Embassy that key officials who have so far confirmed their attendance at the February 18 Inauguration include President Turk of Slovenia, President Topi of Albania, President Ivanov of Macedonia and President Sejdiu of Kosovo. Sweden will be represented by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carl Bildt, and Canada by its Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification, Lynne Yelich. Denmark, Norway and Ireland have said they will be represented by their ambassadors to Croatia. Many invitations are still pending.

¶3. (U) Supreme Court Confirms War Crimes Sentence for Mihajlo Hrastov, but Reduces it from Eight to Seven Years: On January 27, the Supreme Court confirmed its guilty verdict for Mihajlo Hrastov, a former member of Croatian special forces convicted of killing 13 Serb POWs in 1991 by firing bursts of automatic fire at them, but reduced his sentence from eight to seven years. Over several years, the Karlovac County Court had acquitted Hrastov three times, saying that he acted in self-defense. After ordering two previous retrials, in May 2009, the Supreme Court reversed the County Court's acquittal to a conviction and sentenced him to an eight year prison term. In yesterday's decision, the Supreme Court accepted only a small part of Hrastov's appeal and reduced his sentence by one year, saying it recognized that the 47-year-old Hrastov was the father of an underage child and a disabled war veteran decorated several times for his contribution to the war effort with no previous convictions. Hrastov has been in custody since May 2009. This is the final verdict, although Hrastov could still file a constitutional claim or try to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

¶4. (U) Embassy Hosts Regional Trade Control Best Practices Workshop: On January 29-29, Croatian experts from the ministries of defense and economy will meet with Kosovar officials and EXBS representatives to help share best practices and assist Kosovars in writing a final draft to Kosovo's strategic trade control laws. The workshop is a follow up to the EXBS sponsored export control best practices visit to Kosovo between the GoC and the GoK in November, ¶2009. Details on the workshop in Zagreb to follow by septel.

WALKER